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## To Call It 'Lancegate' Is Ludicrous

Haters of the system and apologists for Richard Nixon like to make the misdeeds of Bert Lance the measure of the Carter administration. In that way, Watergate is reduced to a highly publicized version of games all presidents play.

But in fact the troubles of the Carter administration spring not from abuse of personal power but from nonuse of power on impersonal issues. So making a big deal of the Lance affair does a disservice to both President Carter and the public.

In the case of Nixon, egregious dishonesty stood close to the heart of his whole administration. He won in 1968 in part because he falsely gave the impression he had a plan for ending the Vietnam war. He finally achieved a settlement there by dint of secret commitments to South Vietnamese leaders to bomb North Vietnam, which he could never have kept once they became public—as they were bound to.

What he billed as a New Economic Policy in 1971 yielded in 1974 those familiar scourges, inflation and recession. The "generation of peace" proclaimed in the spring of 1973 was followed by a series of miniwars in the Mideast, Asia and Africa. Even the opening to China, while a genuine achievement, was grossly oversold.

Jimmy Carter, by contrast, qualifies for sainthood. His administration has been open to a fault. Far from indulging himself or his colleagues in privilege, he has driven good people from government by the rigor of his standards for personal behavior.

Whatever the outcome of the charges brought against Bert Lance, and those bruited about against the president's brother, Billy, they do not importantly involve abuse of public power. The case against Lance centers on his activity as a private banker. The gossip about Billy Carter has to do with a privately held company in a sleepy town where management practices were casual to the point of sloppiness.

The worst abuse of public trust alleged against Lance and Billy Carter is that they improperly made funds available to the Carter campaign during a critical period of the primaries when

other candidates were running short of money. Even if that suspicion turns out to be true, and there is no evidence of it now, it is small beer compared to the systematic corruption of national institutions attempted by the Nixon administration. To talk of Lancegate or Peanutgate in these conditions is ludicrous.

If any generalization about the Carter administration derives from the Lance case, it has to do with presidential loyalty. Mr. Carter stood by Lance in a way that was ill-advised when the charges against him first arose. The president is paying now for refusing to sack the head of the Central Intelligence Agency, Adm. Stansfield Turner, whose departure would have made it easier to pass the strategic arms limitation treaty. Especially if, as John White of the Democratic National Committee advocated, Mr. Carter had put James Schlesinger back at the agency and used that move to bring a businessman to the Department of Energy.

But even that is straining matters. In fact, the critical issues before the country are not ones where individuals count for all that much. Honesty, for example, is not seriously in question now. For a lot of institutional reasons the fix is out in Washington.

Neither is personality all that important. The psycho-historians who noted flaws in Lyndon Johnson and Nixon and then proclaimed that Jimmy Carter was eminently fit to be president have egg on their faces. The major issues now, the issues of the 1980s, concern the management of large, impersonal problems—inflation, energy and the declining American role in the world. The case of Mr. Carter demonstrates that good intentions are almost irrelevant, and perhaps even downright harmful.

Leadership—though everybody speaks of it—sounds to me like a buzz word that, on analysis, betrays uncertainty. What counts, and what the country ought to be talking about, are sane, feasible programs for dealing with hard questions that none of us understands very well—strategies for minimizing damage during a period when danger outruns